THE CHAPBOOK
(A MONTHLY MISCELLANY)

No. 16
OCTOBER
1920

16 NEW POEMS
By CONTEMPORARY POETS

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THE CHAPBOOK

[A MONTHLY MISCELLANY]

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(See also p. 3 of Cover)

SIXTEEN NEW POEMS
BY CONTEMPORARY POETS

THE CHAPBOOK
(A MONTHLY MISCELLANY)

(Edited by Harold Monro)

Number Sixteen - - - October 1920

THE POETRY BOOKSHOP,
35, Devonshire Street, London, W.C.1

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NOTE.—All MSS. receive careful consideration. Sometimes brief criticism is offered, but where they have not been accepted no further correspondence will be carried on regarding them.

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I

A Barge Girl in Cashiobury

TO see you walk as yesterday,
Down such a path in spring,
In such brave colours, in such haste,
It seems an unreal thing.

With blue beads twisted up your neck
In tight unnumbered strands—
A skirt of red and dark-blue stripes
With two great scarlet bands—

With a curtained, flapping hood of black—
A crimson shirt washed pink—
With an apron blue and a shawl of plaid,
You dyed the mirroring brink

More gaudily than the sun and turf,
And oziers, clouds, and stone
Bridges—and yet how few there are
Who know these things are done!

The towing path was lined with trees,
A little house and white
Stood by each lock, as in a play,
And not a soul in sight.

The first turning had aconites,
Each bank in great gold patches,
The next had an old watermill
With carven beams, and arches.

The third had just a full-brimmed lock
Of water lapsing, drumming.
There the first blackbird called. I knew
That something else was coming . . .

II

The Fair

THE gypsy children with cold quiet eyes
Got ready their suppers and did despise
Us for being excited about
The yellow swings and the roundabout.

Oh ! the pride of the yellow swings,
Prop and seat, such towering things,
Such flashing birds, adventuring boats,
Tapering pinnacles, unheld thoughts.

Tents of wide earth-red bands that drag
Their dye on the white bands. " Penny a bag,
All the jolly fun ! " rang the cries.
Chopped paper to throw and cocoanut shies.

We were all a-fire at the broad bold stripes,
The paper streamers, the vases and pipes.
The children lit fires behind in the grass,
And scarcely looked up to see us all pass.

III

A Garden

THE owner of that garden is
Not half so fond of it as I ;
It has a brook fit to be worked
On porcelain or tapestry.

The preening geese have made the banks
As white, with down, as daisies could ;
It has a shed where I might play,
Sorting brook-pebbles, carving wood.

It has a comic stone-cut lion,
As if some child had thrown him there
To let him have a treat, beneath
The apple-tree to lie and stare.

Grass banks are young, nor ever shall
Know age—but just because he's old
The bridge looks happy, being loved
Of ivy and water, years untold.

The gardener's ghost that planned it, and
Myself that peer across the wall
Haunt it unguessed ; the owner digs,
Without belonging there at all.

IV

March

GREEN triangles have come on the ground,
Green fretted things that we shall see
Grown to wild parsley soon. The hens
Are talking news excitedly.

Big dimples stay in the sparrows' fluff,
They preen with such fine energy.
The very dust's alert. His songs
The blackbird stirs from memory—

The prettiest one he knew last year
Is still a soft uncertainty.
The catkins drip like honey spilt,
The cock crows twice as frequently.

And the wind rises, tossing back
The spring : " You'll like it more," says he,
" For twisting aside, like the blackbird's song,
And vexing you with ' Presently.' "

V

The Aeroplane

THIS afternoon, as it grew late,
You hid in clouds the hue of slate
Far-descending treacherously,
As though to lend you secrecy,
And circled so persistently
There was no escape for me—
Where'er I turned you still came round,
Teeth that grit and claws that ground,
Each deepest-hidden lane you wound
Above, each smallest mound you bound
With belts of brutalizing sound,
And droned and groaned, pounded, and drowned
Birdsong and wind, a pitiless hound—
With this oppression here I found
The air grow heavier than the ground.

VI

The Prettiest Things

THE prettiest things there are must lie
Unused, unheeded utterly.

As where the lorries drop bright oil
Weed-shaped, to turn our highways' soil

As lovely as the ocean-bed,
Blue branching green, gold branching red.

And all the little friendly words
In secret nests of mice and birds.

And window missal-scrolls of frost
Unnumbered times achieved and lost.

And songs that fill the blackbird's head
In March, that August finds unsaid.

And tales we dreamt at five years old
That by no later skill are told.

While towns and faces dull as clay
Are praised and copied every day.

VII

Laughing Gas

WELL, now I'll rest . . . Deep breaths of air
Fragrant where mountain blossoms peep,
Sweet cowbells tinkle, and I'll swear
Some yokel yodelling ! Oh sleep,
Cloud-pillowed : the stars vigil keep . . .

Twin fans that cross wise come and go
Beating a measure soft and slow
Some small imprisoned gnat that sings
Of foolish things
And someone rings and rings
Incessant at the doors of Mind :
And yet within that house I know
What hand has newly dimmed the lights.
There's beat of wings . . .
Nothing but emptiness I find
And velvet dark, and peace o' nights.

VIII

Liturgy

I

O DELIVER me, deliver me from my own self
From treachery, from fear, from hate ;
It seems so long that I have been laid up on the shelf
Like a broken cup or a too, too brittle plate,
Take me, O take me ; wash me with your beams ;
O good Lord, deliver me,
Deliver me from the horror and from the dishonour of my dreams ;
Set me free.

II

At Easter Christ rose up out of the sepulchre and from the sheet,
From bitterness, from hate, from death ;
He rose as an example of the assured, the fleet,
The strong and the possessor and the stainless faith.
Show us, O show us how the earth bore that flight ;
O deliver us from this—
From the tumult, the battle, from the axe and from the night ;
Gloria in excelsis.

III

Deliver us and exalt us in the teeth of the gale,
From the galleys of time, the loom and from the yarn
Whereof our fear is spun, and from the forge and the flail,
And from the stable, the ship and the barn.
Free us as you have freed the frail sisterhood
Of the windflowers where they spin their white sheaves
In the labyrinths of the forest
And in the lightening of the wood ;—
Make us as the leaves,—

IV

Praising and singing when the life and when the peace
Are begun in those nests where the eggs are laid low
And the cocks strut abroad and the rain comes without cease
Making the grass grow :
Acting and desiring as the sower and as the plough
Going forth under the great, bare ribs of the sky ;
Give us the life after death, Lord, now, even now,
And the voice to cry :

V

" O deliver me, deliver me, from evil and sin
From scorn, from absence, from hate and from lust
And give me the robe wherewith to come proudly in,
Not weeping with moth, not creeping with rust,
But confident, but splendid,—quicken'd after the shower
Like to a pear tree that is green with all the white :
O Lord, render my heart a fruitful bower
For thy delight.

VI

Deliver me, O deliver me ; for my flesh is of the stuff
Of labour, of heaviness, of doubt and of care ;
But I have grieved and I have languished
And oh I have been punished enough ;
Why should I despair ?
Take me, then, take me from the halter and from the hook,
Bury my sorrow,
Bury my shadow and my false likeness in the brook ;
Give me to-morrow.

VII

Wherefore, I beseech you that are the beginning and the end,
Show me thy splendour in the appearance of its shape
And come to me at my calling by the wicket like a friend,
Giving me the vision which is the only escape ;
Not that I may maunder and may wonder and may dream,
But that I may give clothing and food,
Beauty to my descendants and water to my team,
In the name of all good."

IX.

Revelation

Near as my hand
The transformation : (time to understand
Is long, but never far,
As things desired are :)
No iceberg floating at the pole ; no mark
Of glittering, perfect consciousness, nor dark
And mystic root of riddles ; death nor birth,—
Except of heart, when flesh is changed from earth
To heaven involved in it : not at all strange,
Not set beyond the common, human range ;
Possible in the steep, quotidian stream,
Possible in a dream ;
Achieved when all the energies are still,—
Especially the will.

X

The Cenotaph

A POLICEMAN watches closely
A moonbeam on the slabs,
Dark troubled men hail sadly
Belated taxi-cabs,

An uninstructed singer,
Swaying his way to bed,
Raises a rakish bowler
To the undying dead ;

And legion upon legion,
Blindly round Big Ben
The new-recruited shadows
Gather against men.

XI

Ghosts

MY House of Love is thronged with ghosts.
Pale fingers touch me on the stair ;
Pale sunlight shines through children's limbs
And firelight falls on silken hair.

Row upon row, old volumes stand
In candleshine that lets me see
Grave elfin children hand in hand
Or struggling to a mother's knee.

Sometimes, when I am half in dreams,
Melodious laughter drifts from room
To empty room in vagrant streams
Like laughing water in the gloom

Of solemn forests. Then perchance
Towards a half-closed door I steal
At sound of voices telling low
Secrets that I would fain unseal.

Upon the shining table-oak
Four points of yellow light are thrown
From four tall silver candlesticks ;
Four heads are clustered, curled and brown. . . .
. . . . . .
But nothing's here save the drab room,
The spluttering gas, the paper flowers,
The dusty furniture, the gloom. . . .
I must have been asleep for hours.

XII

Crabbed Age and Youth

WHEN the cup of thought is full
And the blood of youth is dried,
And the bridegroom's eyes are dull
As they feed upon the bride,
Then the day, ashamed to die,
Listens to her secret cry.

It is dust upon the dead
And the firstling of despair
When they deck the bridal bed,
Wind the flowers in her hair,
For upon the set of sun
Is the punishment begun.

Yet among the summer gleams
When the singing morning breaks,
She can quench her angry dreams
With her years when she wakes
And she sees him lying there,
And she knows she does not care.

And he across his wine
In the quiet of his age,
He can ponder " This is mine ! "
—As she trembles in her cage
She can look at him and laugh,
She can make his epitaph !

XIII

Rencontre

IT is said rightly that we do not change.
I thought that haply you had changed to me
With all the years between, but it is strange
How changed, unchanged the human soul can be.
A thousand years, and we were still the same.
You would be calm and cold and still I should
Be flushed to hear your accents and my name
Through the cold hardness of your rectitude.
You said you hastened lest you lost your train.
I wonder if you noticed how I smiled ?
It was so like you. One time in the rain
You said the same to me. I was a child
Too much to note your subtleties of will.
To-day, I am grown wise with the full dawn
Of womanhood upon my heart and still
I should have lost that train for you and gone
O anywhere ! I should have dreamed again
Poppies and warmth and all the old dead things
No intermittent fortunes can profane.
A thousand summers and a thousand springs
And I am here, swift, warm, responsive still,
With love-words choking for wont utterance,
A passive creature, molten for your will.
I wonder is it by decree or chance
We do these things ? Meet, and then go our ways
Indifferent and separate again,
After the old, still months and the dream days
And the long deep between . . . and then the pain.
Yet here we stood a moment, clothed and gloved
To meet the clamant need of daily bread
And convenance, a moment here, unmoved,
The living touch and voice. And we were dead.

I wonder if you noticed how I swayed ?
I cannot think you did ; your moods are set
To greater harmonies. The things we said
I half forget, remember. Ah how wet
My spirit was with weeping ! One small word
And I was on the brink. I should have cried
A whole life's sorrow. You still held the sword
Of mute correction.
I was at your side
One moment. Now the city throbs apace,
Hustle of business, and you had a train
To catch. By night I shall forget your face
And all this madness, and be once again
The gay automaton you taught me how
To be. A thousand summers and to-night
I shall forget again. I thank you now
For your cold courtesy. You have been right,
We were not made for loving but for pain,
We were too sad for rapture, too replete
With understanding for the common vein
Of married circumstance . . .
I heard your feet
Grow dimmer on the pavement. Then . . . no sound.
. . . . .
They say one loves but once. A truthless thing !
After the winter stirs the teeming ground,
I shall be married ere another Spring.

XIV

World's End

BE my sun and my stars and my God.
How shall I need these if I have you here ?
Who asketh water when the well is near ?
Ah hold me now for the long way I trod
To reach this glory. All the world forsaking.
I come, uncovered, like a naked thing
To offer you my soul's bare worshipping.
O be to me my slumber and my waking,
My starlight and my dawning, be to me
All that the outer, wide creation durst
Not ever be. The best are haply worst.
If I am worst to all, but best to thee
What shall it count ? I told my beads last night
But missed the cross. My cross has yet to be.
The road, perchance, was sweet to Calvary
And green with olives. Someone spake of right
And wrong. What are these things, for I forget.
Now I am here I cannot tell but this
That you are near me. Scandals, calumnies,
I cannot hear them. If my eyes are wet
It is for joy of giving. What is right
That should mean sorrow ? Wrong ? I do not know,
Things are so strangely measured. If I go
Back to my Father's door and say to-night
" I am come back," behold, there is no name
Of mine spelt in his household, only words
Of passion and upbraiding, and twin swords
Before the garden gateway, " Shame and Shame."
This is the price of loving when it comes
So lately and so longly. How one reaps !
There were no shallows for us, only deeps.
I cried for bread, and they had offered crumbs.

. . . . .

My head is hot. Ah, only lay these hands
Upon me, and say, " Peace ! " and light the lamp
And let us be again. My clothes are damp
With the slow rains. What desolate, treeless lands
We passed ! I shivered, shivering. What a night
Of rain and blowing ! They all slept but me.
They seemed such innocent souls, I could not see
Their faces without shuddering. When the light
Shifted to where I sat I looked between
Wet fingers and cried " Mercy ! " with my lips.
And rain can be so pitiless when it drips.
I thought each time it cried " Unclean, unclean ! "
I wanted to ask alms of all the world,
Because they found the general way to good,
Some names are writ in water, some in blood,
I did not see the dawn ; my eyes were blind,
And afterwards I slept.
They woke to eat.
I could not eat, because it seemed a sin
Against his suffering, yet my mind took in
With smallest detail what this one did eat
And what that one, and what trick each did have
In holding fork or knife. My brain seemed set,
A register for little things, and yet
Behind this sensitive numbness lay a grave.
I wondered why I did what I had done,
But it has always seemed I had to do
Whatever I have done. And this thing too.
I tried to reason when I saw the sun,
I said, " Go back, and he will still believe,
And still your name be stainless as a wife."
I could not go. His kindness was the knife
That cut most deep. I could not still deceive.
I wondered why the sun should shine on me
Who sinned so newly, yet it warmed my cheek.

We passed long fields of lambs most white and sleek
With mother-loving . . . Afterwards, the sea.
It left such little ripples where it ebbed,
It made my heart go hungry then turn cold.
This sea. His eyes will watch it and grow old.
It left such little ripples where it ebbed.
I wished I had been made more wholly bad.
The wholly bad, if there are such, omit
The grander cost of sinning, knowing it
And judging what they do. I were less sad,
More wholly wicked if I felt not so.
The soul of all the world is in the sea,
I could not look upon its face and be
This thing hypocrisy would make me grow.
My windows in the summer faced that way,
Unto the sea. It beat upon my heart.
We used to watch the white crests meet and part,
" The multitudinous seas," he used to say.
His ways were most upright, most just, most wise,
In all the years of waiting and of shame
Say never that he drove me, for I came
A shivering thing, with madness in her eyes,
Was ever madness linked with reason so ?
I worshipped his slow, mute philosophies,
But love hath eyes for goodlier feasts than these,
And you had spread them. Ah most base, most low,
Most ugly, most degraded, most . . . What name
Is it they have for us ? And I had been
Always so proud. I set such gates between
Myself and these . . . these fallen. Now, the same . . .
O warm me with your honour till I live,
And make a Spring of all the desolate waste
That lies between. Most chaste and most unchaste !
How few there are amongst us will believe !
You have set flowers for me. They are too red.

I am too pale for scarlet. Cushions too,
Silk cushions and long curtains of deep blue,
Everything is so warm, and I am dead,
Everything is so warm and I am cold,
Draw down the blinds and hide me from the night,
And cover me with righteousness, your right
Before God only, before love. Ah hold
My hands, my heart, for ever be to me
All that the others durst not, cannot mean,
Look down on me and let us smile between
This sadness. But awhile and we shall be
At peace. My head is weary, I am whirled
In infinite spaces with accusing stars,
Close down the curtains now and draw the bars,
Most dear, for whom I sacrifice the world,
And light this lamp and let me look on you.
Time will grow kind to us, and most of all
Will death be kind, and the long interval,
How kind are death and sleep! . . . And loving too . . .
And sorrowing and love have each an end.

. . . . .

What time is it? Ah what a night it was!
How fitfully the shadows strike that vase,
How sweetly the light flickers where you bend.

XV

Reflections

I WATCHED a man
Feeding some goldfish in a lily tank.
He dropped the food, and as it slowly sank,
Importunate, they jostled one another,
Striving to seize the crumbs before each other.

I asked him then
If he'd observed his fish ? What lives they led ?
If some were good, some bad ? How they were bred ?
If in his fish some character were seen ?
If some lived well and others were unclean ?

He laughed at me.
I neither know, he said, nor care,
How these things live, what characters they bear.
So that they breed a healthy stock, and strong,
What matters it if they do right or wrong ?

I have a law
Beyond all laws and morals of their own,
By which the good fish from the bad are known.
If the breed's weak I kill them off, and then
With better fish I stock the tank again.

XVI

War

"We will raise a tower of righteousness upon the earth."

TO build the tower they bent, and the thin lights
Flared in their hands, exultant was the hour
And each white face was full of pitiless strife
And each heart bent under the trampling nights
That surged like waves around the unsteady tower
That they built up of death in praise of life.
And some had given their bodies to these men
Some women gave their souls that the tower might stand,
And some were full of pity and some of praise
These who had had a house and kept a hen
Or two in the back garden or owned land
Down in the West or worked for seven days
At scraping walls for twenty pence an hour.
These rose and left their working and mean ways.
Some women gave their bodies to these men
Some crushed their souls between the stones of the Tower.
They broke and wept in the exultant hour.
For the hours had come against it and it fell
The days had conquered what men strove to do.
Time swept their futile bodies clear of life
And left them as a Monument to Hell.
Eyes empty, shrunken flesh, lips turning blue.
And some men killed their souls upon the strife
Or shattered their dream like glass about the head
Of a beautiful woman and swore this thing was true
And all else Anti-Christ, and went their way
And in a week kept company with the dead.
And every day was an unhappy day
That turned their sweethearts into flowers and trees.

Some women gave their bodies, some bent their knees
And most men died too full of drink to care
For death, a woman's name upon their mouth,
Having forgotten God on the first day
They learnt to kill men and stab swinging bags
Full of cold earth, and noticed how to swear,
And lose their life for the tower, and lose their youth
And lose control of all their filthy words.
This was no glorious thing but a long lie
Uttered by the bodies of men about to die
And built upon the sacrilege of swords.

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